

[Angelo Herndon]

Submitted by Theodore Poston

ANGELO HERNDON COMES BACK FROM GEORGIA

References:

Personal Interview (August 7, 1934)

Memory refreshed from Amsterdam News files New York 1938-9

He was tired. Very tired and very sick. His sagging muscles, pallid face, drooping shoulders and nervous fingers proclaimed it. And as the train headed for Pennsylvania Station where 6,000 people waited impatiently to hail him, Angelo Herndon turned wearily to the reporter who had met him at Manhattan Transfer.

"Oh, the Amsterdam News, I remember it. It was one of the five papers which came to me regularly at Fulton Tower prison, but which they never let me read. The Daily Worker, Amsterdam News, New York Times, Atlanta World and Wall Street Journal." He smiled slowly. "No, they wouldn't let me read even the Wall Street Journal. They poured ink on it."

"How was prison?" the reporter asked. "How did they 2 treat you?"

"It was hell." he answered simply and shrugged his thin shoulders. After a pause he continued:

"They tortured me. Oh, they tried to be clever about it. They insisted they were giving me 'special attention,' but they did things to me under that pretense. They cooked up that lie that I tried to escape. They searched my cell twice for steel saws. They found some rusty

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bits of tin which had been in there for years, and used this as an excuse to move me into a damp cell where water dripped from the ceiling.

"I pointed to the water and told them I was sick. (He looks tubercular) They said: 'We don't give a damn if you drown.' and left me there. Later they put me in the death cell. They put special guards near my door. They taunted me."

"Didn't they give you regular treatment?" the reporter asked, "There was a letter in the Nation from a young white woman who said she visited you and found you were treated all right. She said you looked fine."

"Regular treatment?" he smiled again, wearily, fleetingly. "They took my medicine away from me."

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He looked down at his thin bloodless fingers. "Do I look fine?"

"I remember that young woman. They let her in to see me. I wasn't allowed any other visitors, except my lawyers. I think she was fine. She was a Socialist though. (Herndon is a Communist) As she was leaving she said: 'We are so far apart.'"

Was there a demonstration when he left Fulton Tower prison? What did the other prisoners and guards say? Were they surprised?

"The authorities were dumbfounded. They never expected that we could raise the money. That's why they made the bail \$15,000. The boys were surprised too. They were glad to see me go. They wished me good luck. The turnkey said: 'Hope to see you back soon—for good.'"

"We left quietly. There had been some talk about a lynching. They are conducting a campaign throughout the state against Communists. They didn't bother us though."

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"If the United States Supreme Court reverses your conviction," the reporter asked, "and you are freed at a later trial, will you continue to work in the South?"

"Why not?"

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"Won't the publicity attendant your case make it impossible for you to continue there? Won't it be too dangerous?"

The wry smile again. "It's dangerous to be a worker anywhere—if you're trying to better your condition."

The train was pulling into Pennsylvania Station. Bob Minor, grizzled Communist leader, was the first to reach Herndon. Awkwardly he threw his arms about the youth's frail shoulders and kissed him. James Ford, Negro candidate for the Vice Presidency of the United States in 1932, was second. He too kissed Herndon clumsily. Ruby Bates, one-time accuser but later chief defense witness in the Scottsboro case, was next. She hugged him and held her cheek to his.

Milton, Angelo's young brother, stood a little to the side. The two boys gazed quietly at each other. Silently they shook hands and embraced. On the upper level, 6,000 persons, mainly white, strained against the police lines and yelled for their hero.

Angelo Herndon had come back from Georgia.